

APPENDIX B. Public Scoping Report

This appendix summarizes the issues, concerns, and opportunities identified by the Service, its partners, and the public during the public scoping phase for the Gorge Refuges CCP/EA. Early in the planning process, the Service met with other agencies to develop a list of preliminary issues and concerns for the CCP. These planning issues were presented at public scoping meetings on September 20 and 21, 2000, as well as in a Planning Update (newsletter) and in the Federal Register notice. Information gathered through these and other sources of information is reflected in this public scoping report.

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Exotic and Invasive Species

Many local citizens were concerned about the impact that exotic plants and animals have on native wildlife and habitat. The public specifically mentioned weed control, reed canarygrass, and Himalayan blackberry as concerns on the Gorge Refuges. It is their desire that the Refuge staff employ proven management measures, mechanical removal, and biological controls to reduce exotic species. Additionally, it was suggested that the Refuge staff should increase monitoring efforts for new invasive species and implement appropriate management responses to these threats.

Fisheries and Fish Habitat

The Service received numerous comments on the protection, restoration, and enhancement of salmonid populations and habitat. Predominantly, these comments addressed issues of water quality, barriers to fish passage, and improvements to spawning and rearing habitats. Several comments were registered that the Service should be more active in the protection and restoration of watersheds in the vicinity of the Refuges.

Wetland and Water Management

Water levels in Refuge wetlands and lakes should be managed optimally for a range of habitat conditions, resource needs, and natural wetland functions. A number of comments were received to manage water in a manner consistent with the needs of amphibians, fish, waterfowl, and plants. Some recommended that wetlands be managed seasonally for moist soil plant production to benefit waterfowl. Other comments suggested that water levels should mimic natural fluctuations. The Port of Camas/Washougal requested the Service adjust water levels in Steigerwald Lake for optimal flood control. Some public comment identified the importance of connecting Refuge wetlands to the Columbia River for salmon, while others recommended maintaining wetland impoundments to reduce silt transport from the river and to provide optimal water levels for emergent vegetation. One comment letter received raised the role of beaver control in maintaining water flow through water control structures.

Upland Management

Many people identified the need for the restoration of all habitat types to sustain healthy populations of native plants and animals, particularly rare and declining species. Comment and concern was registered about excessive fuel loads accumulating on Refuge upland habitats and potential degradation of air quality associated with prescribed burning. Public comment was received for improved management techniques and rehabilitation of Refuge pastures for Canada goose browse. Protection and restoration of riparian habitat was identified by public comment as desirable for fish, amphibian, and avian habitats. A number of people showed interest in participating in habitat restoration projects and suggested the Refuge more extensively use the community and volunteer interest groups for habitat projects.

Mosquito Management

Respondents identified the control of nuisance mosquitos as an issue of concern. Some public comments suggested that the Refuge wetlands provide habitat conditions conducive to mosquito production. These respondents requested the Service allow mosquito control on the Gorge Refuges. Conversely, some of the public expressed concern for potential conflicts between mosquito control and Refuge purposes. In particular, they were concerned for the potential impacts of mosquito larvicide to nontarget invertebrates and native fish.

Recreation and Other Public Uses

Wildlife Observation

Many comments were received on public access to the Refuges for the purpose of observing wildlife. Within these comments, a full spectrum of viewpoints and opinions was expressed. Some felt that human disturbances to wildlife should be minimized by restricting or prohibiting access to the Refuges. Others commented that existing service roads could serve as pedestrian trails, and that new trails, viewing platforms, and blinds should be developed, as well as motorized and non-motorized access by canoe or kayak. Others preferred their Refuge experience be allowed under the condition of a guided tour. Overall, most comments related to wildlife observation opportunities seemed to express a desire by the public to minimize or not allow access to the Gorge Refuges and to increase offsite viewing opportunities in order to protect wildlife and their habitats. Scenic area guidelines should be followed when developing any new public use facility on the Refuges.

Hunting and Fishing

The Service received a few comments expressing interest in opening the Refuges to hunting and/or fishing. One comment stated that hunting, fishing, and trapping should be allowed "where needed," implying that these uses should be used for management rather than for recreation. Others suggested that a bullfrog hunt be implemented on Franz Lake Refuge. Another comment stated that "at least one" of the three Refuges should be open to hunting and that Pierce Refuge would probably be the most appropriate. Late in the planning process, the

Washington Waterfowl Association contacted the Service to recommend opening Steigerwald Lake Refuge to waterfowl hunting.

Environmental Interpretation

A few comments referred to recommendations about the content of interpretive messages and the location for their delivery. One comment expressed that interpretation of the Refuges should include the history of the people who used or studied Refuge resources such as early naturalists and biologists. Other comments expressed the need to provide the public with information about the plants and wildlife and information about seasonal water levels in Refuge wetlands. One comment suggested that a visitor services plan for Pierce Refuge should include offsite signs at the town of North Bonneville.

Environmental Education and Public Outreach

Education and outreach issues seemed to spark a great deal of interest in the public when related to public uses on the Refuges. For instance, several comments expressed an interest in seeing educational, interpretive and outreach opportunities developed for the purpose of improving relationships with the local community and to inform people specifically about the purposes of the Refuge. Others suggested the need to develop educational facilities on Pierce Refuge and to use research and management activities in school education programs. It was suggested that volunteers be used to implement environmental education programs on the Refuges.

As a sidebar to information and outreach, a great deal of interest seemed to lie in the topic of ecotourism. Comments included using Refuge recreational opportunities and the proposed Gateway Center at Steigerwald Refuge as a way to promote the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and economic growth in the area. Another comment suggested that economic benefits created by the Refuge be documented and that more efforts be made to communicate with the local governments.

Horseback Riding on Columbia River Dike Trail

Perhaps the largest recreational user group represented in the group of commentators were equestrians. Equestrians submitted comments expressing disagreement with the Service's decision to prohibit horses from using on a portion of the Columbia River Dike Trail on Steigerwald Lake Refuge. This decision, made in a separate Environmental Assessment for the Steigerwald Lake Refuge Gateway Center, had not yet been implemented. One concern that equestrians had was the lack of opportunities for safe, low-elevation trails available in the wet winter and spring months. Others saw the potential to disconnect equestrians from linking into the proposed Chinook Regional Trail from the Port of Camas/Washougal property. Some thought at the very least physically disabled visitors should be allowed trail access by horseback. Others said that all trails developed on the Steigerwald Lake Refuge should be open to horses. Many equestrians submitting comments asserted that horseback riding does not conflict with other user groups. However, they suggested that all users of the Columbia River Dike Trail be taught proper etiquette to reduce potential conflicts between equestrians and other user groups.

Dog Walking on Columbia River Dike Trail

Aside from the one comment offered about allowing dogs on the Refuge in addition to horses, all other comments addressing dogs stated that they should not be allowed on the Refuges.

Plant Harvesting and Wapato Root Feast

A suggestion was made that a wapato root feast be held for the local tribes as part of a way for tribes to reclaim their cultural practices that traditionally occurred in the past.

Law Enforcement

Several comments expressed concern that public use of Cottonwood Beach park adjacent to Steigerwald Lake Refuge is “spilling over” onto the Refuge. Another comment identified the need to protect archaeological sites that were not necessarily on but perhaps adjacent to Refuge property. Others expressed a concern that poaching was occurring on the Refuges because no law enforcement presence is visible on the Refuges.

Partnerships

Protection and preservation of natural resources within the Columbia Gorge will require advocacy and partnerships with state and county agencies, the local community, the citizenry, universities and educational institutions, natural resource based organizations and other entities. Comments were registered advising the Refuge to work more closely with other agencies and user groups, the public, volunteers, and non-governmental organizations. Shared knowledge, resources, labor, and equipment would enhance management of the natural resources we collectively wish to protect and enhance. Construction of an interagency Gateway Center is recognized by the citizenry as a potential economic benefit to the community and an opportunity to promote the recreation and tourism within the Scenic Area.